

National Research Council Reviews Corps Navigation Study

The National Research Council (NRC) has provided a report on their review of the Corps of Engineers' Draft Upper Mississippi River - Illinois Waterway System Navigation Feasibility Report as requested by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The NRC report offers both positive comments and areas of concern that will be used, together with other federal state agency comments, to develop the final Corps recommendation to be contained in the Chief of Engineers' report scheduled for November 2004.

The NRC acknowledges the challenges of developing a long-term plan for navigation efficiency and ecosystem restoration. Additionally, the NRC report states that the preferred plan contained in the draft report provides an "excellent framework for comprehensive adaptive management" of the river system and that many of the study's weaknesses can be overcome by the recommended adaptive management.

"We recognize the limitations of the state-of-the-art in economic and environmental analysis, and our recommended plan contains many adaptive management components," said Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, Commander, Mississippi Valley Division. "The NRC Panel has provided important information and recommendations that will assist in developing the adaptive implementation plan for both navigation efficiency improvements and ecosystem restoration.

"While the NRC noted the need to improve our evaluations of economic and ecosystem restoration matters," Brig. Gen. Crear added, "the NRC also acknowledged that these concerns go beyond the scope of the study and credited the Corps for initiating a research program aimed at developing new economic models for evaluation of inland navigation projects. The NRC also noted that we do not need to stop while these areas are addressed and can proceed with implementation while we work on continuing data collection, improving modeling techniques and adapt the plan to emerging conditions."

"This review is important to ensure Congress and the public are provided with a quality review of our draft report," said Brig. Gen. Crear. "The efforts of this distinguished panel are the product of a great deal of effort and commitment, and the Corps has benefited from the members' broad experiences. We thank them for their efforts and look forward to reviewing their analysis and recommendations in detail."

Since restarting the study in 2002, a key component was to conduct the study in a spirit of open collaboration with federal, state, non-governmental partners and the public. "We completed this study openly and collaboratively and the NRC panel's recommendations will be of great help to us," Brig. Gen. Crear noted.

The draft feasibility report was completed as a collaborative effort of the Federal Principals Group, consisting of senior managers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the states of Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota; and the non-government organizations participating in the study.

Information about the NRC findings can be found at the National Academies website and details about the Upper Miss study are at the Restructured Navigation Study website .